

Introduction

The List of 2,000 Common English Words for Elementary and Junior High School Students (hereafter referred to as the Wordlist; 「國民中小學 2,000 常用英文字詞表」), which can be retrieved from http://www.k12ea.gov.tw/97_sid17/英語970526定稿單冊.pdf, was released by the Ministry of Education of Taiwan (MOE), as Appendix Four of Grade 1-9 English Curriculum Guidelines [國民中小學九年一貫課程綱要語文學習領域(英語)]. The Wordlist was intended to serve a number of purposes, but certainly one of the most important was to regulate the choice of words in English textbooks published by different publishers, so that English teaching materials dovetail, and wide discrepancies in vocabulary used in different textbooks are avoided. Since it was released in 2008 and put into effect in 2011, the Wordlist has served as an authoritative guide to the choice of words for elementary and junior high school English textbooks. For example, in the introduction to the English textbooks published by Joy English [佳音英語] (Tian & Lin, 2011), Kang Hsuan Educational [康軒] (Feng, 2011), and Nani Book [南一] (Liu, 2011), the three major publishers of junior high school English textbooks in Taiwan, the first item listed is the basis of compilation (editorial note), and all of them acknowledge Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines as their basis of compilation. In addition, the Wordlist is one of the main reference materials for the preparation of the elementary-level General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), which is very popular with English learners in Taiwan. Elementary and junior high school students in Taiwan are often required to memorize the words on the Wordlist by their schools or English teachers, as words on the Wordlist often appear in the Basic Competence Test for Junior High School Students [國中基測], now called Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students [國中教育會考].

Wordlists are of great importance, not only for language teachers, but also for language learners, especially beginners such as elementary and junior high school students (Carter, 2012). This is because “learning the most frequent 2,000-3,000 words in a language provides a firm basis of about 80 percent of the words likely to be encountered,” and it is generally accepted that “knowing the most frequent 2,000 words

in English delivers understanding of between 80-90 percent of words likely to be encountered” (Carter, 2012; Nation, 2004). Thus, we must applaud MOE for providing a list of 2,000 common English words for elementary and junior high school students; we recognize the importance of a list of high-frequency English words in facilitating the learning of English, especially for beginning learners of English.

Unfortunately, however, the Wordlist, though of great importance to English learners, teachers, teacher trainers, researchers, curriculum developers, materials writers, and exam setters, is not limited to items that are learnable or teachable from a pedagogical perspective. In addition, it contains a number of errors. In our opinion, the crux of the problem lies in the way words are structured on the Wordlist, which fails to reflect the complex nature of words, especially those of high frequency. The learning of particular words is a gradual, long-term, cumulative process, and this is not recognized in the Wordlist. This paper proposes improvements to the Wordlist, so that rather than a static list, it incorporates a dynamic element. This can be done by referring to the English Vocabulary Profile (EVP), an innovative online resource that provides a fully interactive database, especially for its structure of wordlist entries.

A Content Analysis of the Wordlist

The Wordlist is intended for elementary and junior high school students in Taiwan. These English learners are basic users of English (Council of Europe, 2001). MOE claims that there are 2,000 words on the Wordlist, of which 1,200 are underlined. The underlined 1,200 words are intended as words for production, while the remaining 800 words, which are not underlined, are intended as words for recognition.

The 2,000 words on the Wordlist are listed alphabetically from A to Z. For example, *drink* is listed under D, *lie* under L, *right* under R, *study* under S, and so forth. The following list extracted from the Wordlist contains the 79 words listed under R, 43 of which are underlined:

R— rabbit, race, radio, railroad, railway, rain, rainbow, raincoat, rainy, raise, rare, rat, rather, reach, read, ready, real, realize, really, reason, receive,